Ten Years of Agricultural Land Preservation

84- 4580

On 21 December 1972, the Lieutenant - Governor signed into law Order - in - Council # 4483/72 which froze subdivision of all lands deemed to be suitable for agricultural use. Referred to as the "land freeze" this Order marked the beginning of an agricultural land preservation program in British Columbia. This was followed by the Provincial Legislative Assembly assenting to the Land Commission Act on 18 April 1973.

This report is to mark the tenth anniversary of the initiation of this program. It is dedicated to all those far-sighted people who saw the need for such a program, as well as all those who have supported it during the course of the past ten years.

TEN YEARS OF AGRICULTURAL LAND PRESERVATION IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

THE PROVINCIAL AGRICULTURAL LAND COMMISSION

December 1983

C O N T E N T S

THE INITIATION OF AN AGRICULTURAL LAND PRESERVATION PROGRAM IN BRITISH COLUMBIA 4

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE AGRICULTURAL LAND RESERVE 6

REACTION TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AGRICULTURAL LAND PROTECTION LEGISLATION 10

ADMINISTRATION OF THE AGRICULTURAL LAND RESERVE 12

Introduction 12

Applications 13

Community & Settlement Plans 14

Fine Tuning 14

Soil Conservation Act 15

Other Activities 15

Commission's Acquisition/Lease Program 15

Special Projects 16

Langley Farms 17

Vernon Spray Effluent 18

Farm & Stream Report. 18

Columbia Windermere Study 18

Assessment & Taxation 19

Green Zone. 19

THE HUMOUROUS SIDE OF AGRICULTURAL LAND PRESERVATION IN BRITISH COLUMBIA 22

REFLECTIONS ON THE AGRICULTURAL LAND RESERVE PROGRAM 29

. . . . W. T. Lane Chairman 1973 - 1975 30
. . . . G. G. Runka Chairman 1975 - 1979 33
. . . . A. C. Kinnear Chairman 1979 - 1980 36
. . . . M. F. Clarke Chairman 1980 - 38
. . . . B. C. Institute of Agrologists 42
. . . . B. C. Federation of Agriculture 45

ANALYSIS & OBSERVATION 47

THE FUTURE 52

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF ARTICLES PERTAINING TO AGRICULTURAL LAND PRESERVATION IN BRITISH COLUMBIA I

THE INITIATION OF AN AGRICULTURAL LAND PRESERVATION PROGRAM IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

The decision to initiate an agricultural land preservation program in British Columbia came about in recognition of the fact that the province has an extremely limited supply of arable land. British Columbia consists mainly of a series of parallel mountain ranges with climates and soils suitable for agricultural purposes generally only found in the valley bottoms or interior plateaus between these ranges. Even within these areas, variations in soils, climate, topography, and drainage patterns further limit the amount of land which can be utilized for farm purposes. In all, only approximately 4% of the land base is considered arable.

Historically, settlements have located in the valley bottoms or on river deltas throughout the province - on or near some of the best agricultural lands. As our population has expanded, this coincident locational relationship has further jeopardized our already limited agricultural land resource. Prior to 1972, urbanization and associated non-farm uses were expanding at a rapid rate onto some of the best agricultural lands. In fact, some have estimated that approximately 4,000 to 6,000 hectares per year of prime agricultural land were being converted to non-farm uses. At the same time, the province was importing approximately 65% of its

food needs. This heavy dependence on external sources of food, coupled with the rapidly eroding agricultural land base, would have placed B.C. in a very insecure position, especially if traditional sources of food imports suddenly became unavailable or greatly increased in price.

In late 1972, in recognition that this scarce resource was rapidly diminishing, the provincial government commenced legislative action to develop a farmland preservation program. The first step was the passing of Order-in-Council #4483/72 on 21 December 1972. Popularly known as the "land freeze" this Cabinet Order prevented subdivision and non-farm use of land affected by it. This sudden and dramatic land-use restriction was enacted under the provisions of the *Environment and Land Use Act*, a little used but very powerful statute passed in early 1971. The effect of the Order-in-Council was to bring an immediate halt to non-farm development of farmlands pending the introduction and implementation of longer term statutory remedies.

In a province comprised of approximately 90 million hectares of land, the task of identifying the agricultural land base quickly through legislative means was difficult. Order-in-Council #4483/72 addressed this by freezing the subdivision of all land that was taxed as farmland including all lands deemed to be suitable for the cultivation of agricultural crops. On 18 January 1973, a second Order-in-Council #157/73 was passed which detailed the extent of the "land freeze" as established under the provisions of Order-in-Council #4483/72. This second Cabinet order prevented changes in the use of land on property greater than two acres that was classified as farmland for taxation purposes, or designated as having Canada Land Inventory agricultural capability Classes 1, 2, 3 or 4.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE AGRICULTURAL LAND RESERVE

The designation process of the actual Agricultural Land Reserve commenced shortly after 18 April 1973, when Bill 42, the *Land Commission Act*, was assented to by the provincial legislature. This action created the Provincial Land Commission and empowered it to designate Agricultural Land Reserves (ALRs) throughout British Columbia. The principle objectives of the new legislation were the preservation of agricultural land for farm use and encouragement for the establishment and maintenance of family farms.

In addition to these two primary objectives, the *Land Commission Act* also contained the secondary objectives of: preserving greenbelt land in and around urban areas, preserving land bank land for urban and industrial development, and preserving parkland for recreational use. Only in the case of agricultural lands, however, was the Commission granted zoning powers. In the case of greenbelt land, land bank land, and parkland, preservation could only be accomplished through acquisition of land. It should be noted that amendments to the legislation in 1977 narrowed the focus to agricultural lands only by deleting the land bank, greenbelt and parkland objectives and renaming the legislation to the *Agricultural Land Commission Act*.

The establishment of the Agricultural Land Reserve was done with the participation of each of the twenty-eight Regional Districts. The Department of Agriculture (now the Ministry of Agriculture and Food) prepared suggested Agricultural Land Reserve Plans for each of the Regional Districts using both the existing Canada Land Inventory agricultural capability mapping and the Department's extensive knowledge of the location of good agricultural lands. The Commission then distributed both the Canada Land Inventory (CLI) maps and the suggested Agricultural Land Reserves to the Regional Districts. During this period, the Land Commission toured extensively throughout the province, meeting various Regional District Boards and Municipal Councils to explain the intent

and process of the program. Each Regional District then prepared an ALR plan for their region using the suggested plan as a basis, but tempering it with their knowledge of the local situation, including population growth, servicing patterns, and other planning input. Information meetings and public hearings were held by the Regional Districts, thus providing an important public contribution to the proposed ALR plans.

Upon receipt of the proposed ALR plans from the Regional Districts, the Commission reviewed each plan to ensure that the intent of the *Land Commission Act* was complied with and to ensure consistency in approach throughout the province. Following Commission review and discussion with the Regional Districts, and amendment to the plans as necessary, the proposed ALR designations were then reviewed by various resource ministries of the provincial government as well as the Environment and Land Use Committee of Cabinet. Each Regional District ALR plan was then approved by Cabinet, followed by official designation as an Agricultural Land Reserve by the Commission. Only after the ALR plans were designated did the provisions of the *Land Commission Act* apply. Since the original Orders-in-Council were then redundant, they were lifted shortly after designation for each Regional District. The designation process was substantially completed during 1974/75, at which time 4,721,295 hectares of land were designated as Agricultural Land Reserve in the province. The process represented an enormous amount of work and could not have been completed in such a short time without concerted effort and commitment of all involved. The approximate extent of the ALR is shown on Map 1 and the area of designation by each Regional District is shown in Table 1.

During the inception of the farmland preservation program, there was early recognition that saving the land alone would not be enough. The farmers who husband the land also required attention. The *Land Commission Act* was thus only one aspect of the larger overall objective of enhancing agricultural production throughout the province. As a result, other agricultural support programs such as Farm Income Insurance, agricultural land development and clearing assistance, low interest loans, etc., were initiated to complement the farmland preservation program.

Map 1

LOCATION OF AGRICULTURAL LAND RESERVES IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

TABLE 1

APPROXIMATE HECTARAGE OF AGRICULTURAL LAND RESERVE
BY REGIONAL DISTRICT AT DATE OF DESIGNATION
AND AS OF 1 APRIL 1982

REGIONAL DISTRICT	APPROXIMATE AREA AT DATE OF DESIGNATION	APPROXIMATE AREA AS OF 1 APRIL /82	DATE OF DESIGNATION OF ALR PLAN
Alberni Clayoquot	7,935.2	7,878.5	18 Apr. 1974
Bulkley Nechako	297,611.3	297,221.3	17 Jan. 1975
Capital	19,595.1	18,471.6	27 June 1974
Cariboo	925,506.1	914,752.2	29 Nov. 1974
Central Coast	4,453.4	4,425.6	17 Jan. 1975
Central Fraser Valley	55,344.1	53,034.6	24 April 1974
Central Kootenay	71,538.5	67,318.0	27 Sept. 1974
Central Okanagan	33,076.9	32,351.5	24 July 1974
Columbia Shuswap	67,408.9	60,008.7	3 Sept. 1974
Comox Strathcona	43,724.7	41,406.4	21 May 1974
Cowichan Valley	21,983.8	21,174.7	21 May 1974
Dewdney Alouette	23,765.2	21,362.6	24 Apr. 1974
East Kootenay	272,510.1	269,048.5	17 Apr. 1975
Fraser Cheam	36,761.1	36,203.0	26 Aug. 1974
Fraser Fort George	349.635.6	362,879.5	19 Aug. 1974
Greater Vancouver	32,550.6	32,007.1	12 June 1974
Kitimat Stikine	64,170.0	65,909.9	29 Nov. 1974
Kootenay Boundary	55,060.7	54,948.3	27 Sept. 1974
Mount Waddington	1,740.9	1,740.9	21 Dec. 1976
Nanaimo	21,052.6	20,796.9	5 July 1974
North Okanagan	70,283.4	69,679.0	15 March 1974
Okanagan Similkameen	86,477.7	85,973.7	13 Feb. 1974
Peace River Liard	1,498,987.9	1,497.842.9	21 June 1974
Powell River	14,129.6	9,731.6	29 Nov. 1974
Skeena Queen Charlotte	43,886.6	43,719.9	13 Feb. 1975
Squamish Lillooet	27,125.5	26,852.4	21 May 1974
Sunshine Coast	6,275.3	4,227.5	3 Apr. 1974
Thompson Nicola	568,704.5	567,030.8	20 Aug. 1974
TOTAL	4,721,295.3	4,687,997.6	

REACTION TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AGRICULTURAL LAND PROTECTION LEGISLATION

To say that initial reaction to the establishment of agricultural land protection was "controversial" would perhaps be an understatement. Not surprisingly, the abruptness of introduction of the legislation led to many misunderstandings and the general lack of information on such a new and innovative program initially created a highly pronounced negative reaction.

Numerous letters of opposition were sent to the government in Victoria. Telegrams were sent to Prime Minister Trudeau and advertisements were taken out in local newspapers in an attempt to prevent the adoption of the legislation. On 15 March 1973, a protest march drew approximately 2,500 people to the lawns of the Parliament Buildings in Victoria. A final example of the degree of emotion associated with the legislation was seen in a telegram which was reportedly sent to the Queen at Buckingham Palace asking her to withhold royal assent from Bill 42.

Over time, the highly vocalized emotional climate of opposition slowly turned to neutral acceptance and, ultimately, positive support. Public endorsement has steadily grown to the point where most landowners directly affected by the legislation are now supportive. In 1979 a study by the Lands Directorate of Environment Canada found that approximately 83% of 525 ALR landowners surveyed were in favour of the legislation.

While farmer's organizations protested the legislation during its introduction, they now actively assist the Commission with its administration. Some members of the general public may not have fully understood and were skeptical of the program initially, but now individual citizens, environmental associations, and organized labour often voluntarily take on a watchdog role by monitoring the Commission's decisions and reporting infractions. Whereas the initial introduction of the legislation in 1973 received vocal opposition, it now appears that the concept of agricultural

land preservation has become firmly established and widely accepted. Over the years the legislation has served to protect a very important component of a stable agricultural community - the land resource base - and as a result it has received positive response and support.

The Commission's association with local governments throughout the province has also revealed a generally high level of support. Policies and objectives bolstering agricultural land preservation are now found in most Regional, Settlement and Community Plans in place across the province.

Perhaps another indication of the increased awareness of the need for agricultural land preservation programs of this nature is the adoption of legislation with similar intent in other provinces across Canada and in jurisdictions across North America. Legislation similar to that in British Columbia (involving a body with regulatory powers and a system of provincial agricultural land use zoning) has now been adopted in Quebec (*The Act to Preserve Agricultural Land)* and in Newfoundland (*The Development Areas Act)*. The provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island have also adopted various less stringent measures to assist in the objectives of protecting agricultural land. In the United States, a wide variety of measures, some fiscal in nature but many regulatory in aspect, have been enacted in many states in an attempt to curb the erosion of the agricultural land base. The fact that British Columbia's program has been and still is used as a model in many other jurisdictions is testimony of its solid foundation - the program is withstanding the test of time.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE AGRICULTURAL LAND RESERVE

INTRODUCTION

Approximately 4.7 million hectares of land are designated as Agricultural Land Reserve. In order to faciliate its objectives, the *Agricultural Land Commission Act* establishes a Commission and provides for a General Manager and support staff. The support staff, which currently consists of twenty-five members, are all located in one office, and are responsible for the daily administration of the legislation. The Commission is an independent Crown Corporation which reports to the Cabinet through the Minister of Agriculture and Food.

From the outset, the Commission has maintained a policy of keeping its staff to a small, close-knit working group, thus avoiding the pitfalls of burgeoning bureaucracy. The concept was, and continues to be, to use the expertise and assistance of other agencies of government as necessary. For example, the Commission relies extensively on the services of the Soils Branch, Property Management Branch, the Regional Directors and individual District Agriculturists, Horticulturists, and other extension and resource people in the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. In addition, staff of the Terrestrial Studies Branch of the Ministry of Environment, Range Management Branch of the Ministry of Forests, Planning Branch of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, and the Farmer Advisors of the B.C. Federation of Agriculture provide sound advice and assistance.

The ability to operate the program with such a small staff is also largely due to the tremendous support and assistance received from local government in the processing of applications. A great deal of information is willingly provided by staff of Regional Districts and Municipalities and were it not for this invaluable assistance, the Commission staff would likely have to be at least four times its present size. (By comparison the staff of the Quebec Commission exceeds one hundred people for the administration of considerably less ALR.) This consciously applied concept of shared information and shared decision making is in no

small way a very significant contributing factor to the acceptance and success of the program to date.

APPLICATIONS

The Commission holds meetings several days each month and the majority of its time is devoted to the deliberation of applications. The legislation provides for various application routes for subdivision or non-farm use of Agricultural Land Reserve lands, exclusion of lands from the ALR, as well as inclusion of lands into the ALR. Each year, the Commission reviews in the order of thousands of such applications. Each application is considered on its own merits, with the Commissioners reviewing the information in the file, looking at photographs if available, considering the recommendations of the Regional District or Municipality, and actively debating the issues focussing on the application. No application is ever considered routine and often the Commission will spend half an hour or more in discussion before arriving at a decision. There are also many situations in which the Commission will request further information or advice from local government, other agencies, or its farm advisors. The Commission has demonstrated a willingness to review applications with an open mind but in the context of the objectives of the Act.

The administration of the legislation necessitates visiting all areas of the province. During the course of its travels, the Commission meets with representatives of all levels of local and regional government as well as with members of the public during the hearing of exclusion applications. If time permits, the Commission also tries to personally view as many of the properties under application as is possible. Naturally, with a province three and one-half times the size of France, it is not always possible to see every property, but of the 4.7 million hectares of land in the ALR a substantial portion has been personally viewed by the Commission.

COMMUNITY AND SETTLEMENT PLANS

The Commission also has an active role in the community and settlement planning process in the province. The coincident locational relationship between settlement patterns and good agricultural land has dictated that most communities in B.C. have some ALR lands within their jurisdiction. The Commission reviews plans and bylaws which pertain to lands affected by the ALR to ensure that the intent of the *Agricultural Land Commission Act* is respected and complied with during the planning process. Since commencing its operation, the Commission has reviewed and commented on approximately three hundred Regional, Settlement and Community Plans, Zoning and Subdivision Control Bylaws, Transportation Network Plans and Crown Land Plans.

FINE TUNING

The Commission is also currently conducting "fine tuning" of the ALR boundary in specific regions of the province. Fine tuning is the term used by the Agricultural Land Commission to describe the process of reviewing Agricultural Land Reserve boundaries. The purpose of ALR fine tuning is to review, in a consistent manner and using predetermined criteria, lands with the potential for agricultural use which are presently outside the ALR, and lands with very limited possibilities for agriculture that are within the Reserve. The end product of the fine-tuning process is a more credible and defendable Agricultural Land Reserve boundary.

In 1980 funding was provided for the establishment of the "Enhanced Fine Tuning Program". The purpose of this program is to conduct fine-tuning of the ALR in a limited number of specific project areas of the province.

The Commission is firmly committed in its belief that refinement of the ALR boundary through this program along with the plan review process are the key elements of ensuring a successful agricultural land protec-

tion program. Credible ALR boundaries, coupled with a planning process intent on managing community growth in a manner which minimizes impact to the ALR, will provide a firmer basis for confident investment by members of the agricultural community.

SOIL CONSERVATION ACT

The *Soil Conservation Act* is also administered by the Commission, in conjunction with the Soils Branch of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. This legislation only applies to land within the ALR and its basic intent is to prohibit removal of soil or placement of fill on land without a permit. Commission staff responds to violations of the Act (illegal filling, stripping of top-soil, etc.) and prepares and presents applications made under the *Act* to the Commission. Commission deliberations in this capacity centre upon the protection of the actual soil resource itself and recommendations for soil and land rehabilitation often result from review of applications under this legislation.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

The preservation of the land resource is only one component (albeit an extremely important component) of the successful equation necessary to enhance agricultural opportunity. The other important components are the food producers and the farm community infrastructure. The Commission feels very strongly that, as well as preserving the agricultural land resource, we must also work to preserve the expertise of the farmer and protect the sense of identity, self confidence and vitality of the farm community if we are to be successful in the long term.

Commission Acquisition/Lease Program

The *Agricultural Land Commission Act* grants the Commission powers to acquire, dispose of and also to lease property. These powers form the basis of the Commission's farmland acquisition and long-term lease program. Over the years the Commission has acquired some

fifty-seven properties totalling approximately 4,250 hectares. It also administers some twenty-three properties (1,000 hectares) owned by the Crown as well as approximately sixty parcels (400 hectares) which are remnants of Highway corridors. These lands are leased out to farmers who are under-capitalized or have an insufficient land base. The program emphasizes twenty year leases to farmers with an option to purchase after three years of successful farming. It should be noted that the land acquisition program is currently dormant and no properties have been purchased since 1976 due to lack of funding. However, the Commission sees this program as having provided a valuable service over the past several years in that it has allowed many young and under-capitalized farmers to become established in the agricultural community and it is the Commission's hope that the land acquisition program will be re-established during improved economic conditions.

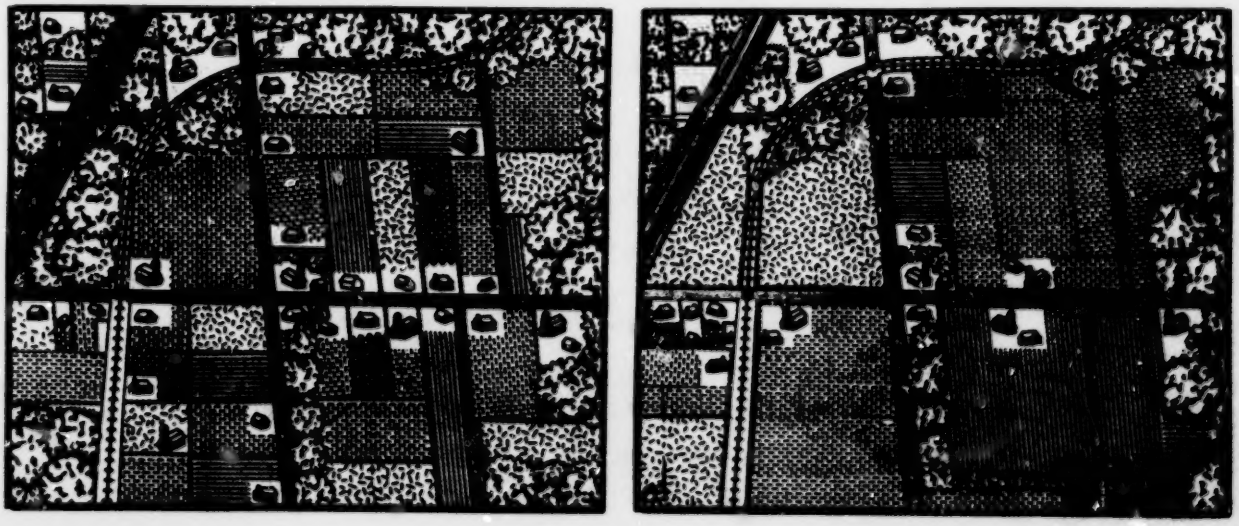
The Property Management Branch of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food is responsible for the administration of Commission owned properties on a day to day basis. The Branch works closely with the Commission, providing valuable information on agricultural land management matters. Members of the Property Management Branch also assist the Commission on projects other than the leasehold program. Agricultural suitability and farmland improvement information is frequently provided by this Branch on request from the Commission during its review of applications and plans.

Special Projects

There are a number of special projects which the Commission has undertaken in an effort to enhance agricultural opportunities. These show the breadth of involvement of the Commission in the agricultural spectrum.

Langley Farms

Associated with the farmland acquisition program, the Commission fell heir to approximately 800 hectares of property in the Township of Langley. The property was characterized by a wide variety of landscapes and soil types and comprised more than 125 small legal parcels. The history of subdivision on these properties made many of them too small and too awkward in size to be considered significant from an agricultural perspective despite the fact that the soils had good potential for agricultural utilization. The Commission seized upon the opportunity to consolidate and replot the parcels according to terrain and landscape features to demonstrate the broad range of agricultural activities that could be accommodated given a concerted effort to alter past subdivision mistakes. With the help of the Property Management Branch, a land use plan and farm unit plan for the 'Langley Farms' was completed and the original 800 hectares was resurveyed into approximately thirty-five farm units. These farms were then leased to farmers on a long-term basis and a wide variety of agricultural activities are now taking place on these units.



Langley Farms before and after consolidation.

Vernon Spray Effluent

Another example of the utility of the farmland acquisition program was the Commission's purchase of approximately 485 hectares of land near the City of Vernon. The City was undertaking a major spray effluent sewage disposal program and required lands for the disposal of the spray effluent. With the co-operation of the City, the Commission leased the previously arid lands to the City as a demonstration of the agricultural value of this method of effluent disposal.

Farm and Stream Report

In 1977 there was serious concern expressed by farmers over the administration of the federal *Fisheries Act* and the provincial *Water Act* relating to water management on farms. In co-operation with the B.C. Federation of Agriculture, a Farm and Stream Committee was formed under the Chairmanship of the Agricultural Land Commission. The Committee's objective was to alert farmers and government officials to the need for open communication and a common sense approach to water management relative to farm operations. The Committee was successful in producing a document that explained the legal requirements and identified potential conflicts. The publication had wide distribution and no doubt contributed greatly towards bridging what was becoming an increasingly widening communications gap.

Columbia Windermere Study

Through its work in dealing with applications in the Columbia Windermere area of the East Kootenays, the Commission became increasingly aware of potential conflicts with many proposed recreational developments and the resulting threat that they posed to agricultural lands. The Commission brought the concern

to the Environment and Land Use Committee and the result was a study to identify suitable areas for accommodating recreational land development while creating the least conflict to the agricultural community. Final phases of the study and further work are currently ongoing.

Assessment and Taxation

The question of assessment and taxation of agricultural lands is an issue with which the Commission has been concerned for some years. The Commission has made a number of submissions to government on the matter and was largely instrumental in establishing provincial policy to provide some relief to owners of agricultural land by reducing by fifty percent the assessment for school and hospital purposes. While this policy did not totally reflect the Commission's position on assessment and taxation of agricultural lands, it nonetheless went some distance in providing a measure of relief for the agricultural community.

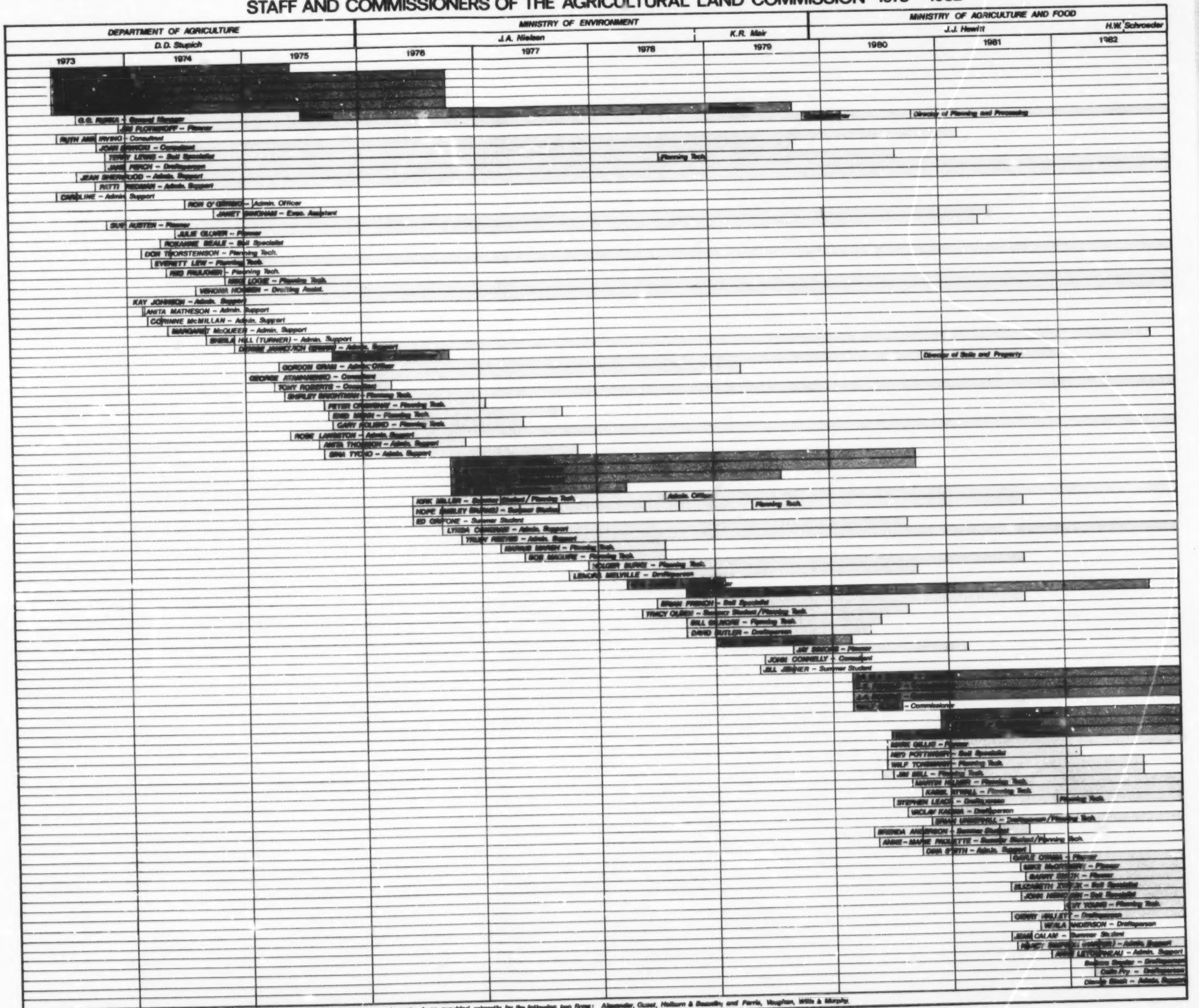
Green Zone

The Commission participates in the Green Zone Committee in conjunction with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and the B.C. Federation of Agriculture. The purpose of the Green Zone Program is to develop model zoning bylaws for the control of intensive livestock operations which could then be adapted to local conditions by a municipality or regional district. The result of the implementation of such bylaws is to establish protection for both agricultural and non-agricultural investment within a particular area.

From the initial establishment of the Reserves to the present time, the responsibilities and sheer workload of the Commission and its support staff have been extensive. In fact, many members of the public, as well as agencies which deal with the Commission, are surprised to see that 4.7 million hectares of land are administered by an organization comprised of only twenty-five members. Again it is stressed that the administration of the farmland preservation program would not be possible without the hard work and dedication of the various agencies and individuals that freely give support and advice.

The chart on the following page depicts the Ministers responsible for the Agricultural Land Commission, the Chairmen, Commissioners, and staff since its initiation. It is significant to note the general stability of the staff - a factor which contributes to continuity and consistency.

STAFF AND COMMISSIONERS OF THE AGRICULTURAL LAND COMMISSION 1973 - 1982

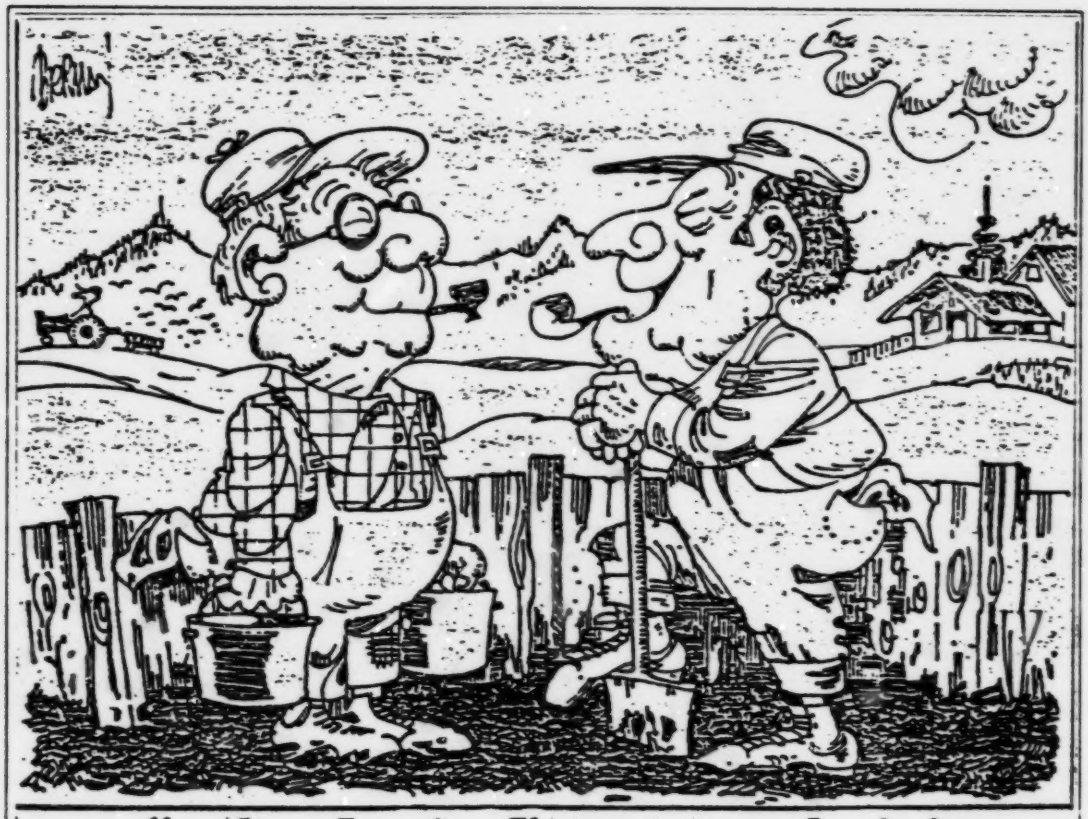

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
D.D. Stupich
MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT
J.A. Nielsen
K.R. Mair
MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD
J.J. Hewitt
H.W. Schroeder
1973
1974
1975
1976
1977
1978
1979
1980
1981
1982
G.G. RUSKA – General Manager
JIM FLOWERDAY – Planner
RUTH ANN IRVING – Consultant
JOAN GORDON – Consultant
TERRY LEWIS – Soil Specialist
JANE PERCH – Draftsperson
JEAN SHERWOOD – Admin. Support
PATTI REDAHAN – Admin. Support
CAROLINE – Admin. Support
RON O'GRADY – Admin. Officer
JANET SWINDHAM – Exec. Assistant
SUE AUSTEN – Planner
JULIE GLOVER – Planner
ROXANNE BEALE – Soil Specialist
DON THORSTEINSON – Planning Tech.
EVERETT LEW – Planning Tech.
RIKI RAUDNER – Planning Tech.
MIKE LOOSE – Planning Tech.
VERONA HOSKEN – Drafting Assist.
KAY JOHNSON – Admin. Support
ANITA MATHESON – Admin. Support
CORINNE McMILLAN – Admin. Support
MARGARET McQUEEN – Admin. Support
SHEILA HILL (TURNER) – Admin. Support
GORDON GRAM – Admin. Officer
GEORGE ATAMANENKO – Consultant
TONY ROBERTS – Consultant
SHIRLEY BAIKIEMAN – Planning Tech.
PETER CAVERHILL – Planning Tech.
BOB MANN – Planning Tech.
GARY ROLSRD – Planning Tech.
ROSE LAWRETON – Admin. Support
ANITA THOMSON – Admin. Support
GINA TYCHO – Admin. Support
KIRK MILLER – Summer Student / Planning Tech.
HOPE BARLEY (BAILEY) – Summer Student
ED GRIFONE – Summer Student
LYNDA CONSTANT – Admin. Support
TRUDY REEVES – Admin. Support
RONALD MARSH – Planning Tech.
BOB SIGURE – Planning Tech.
ROGER BURKE – Planning Tech.
LENORA MELVILLE – Draftsperson
Planning Tech.
Admin. Officer
Planning Tech.
Director of Planning and Processing
Director of Soils and Property
BRIAN FRENCH – Soil Specialist
TRACY OLSEN – Summer Student / Planning Tech.
BILL GILMORE – Planning Tech.
DAVID BUTLER – Draftsperson
JAY SIMONS – Planner
JOHN CONNELLY – Consultant
JILL JENNER – Summer Student
– Commissioner
MARK GILLIS – Planner
HEY POTTHOFF – Soil Specialist
WOLF TORNBERG – Planning Tech.
JIM BELL – Planning Tech.
MARTIN HILMER – Planning Tech.
KAREL STRIHAL – Planning Tech.
STEPHEN LEACH – Draftsperson
VACLAV KAISNA – Draftsperson
BRIAN LINDSTROM – Draftsperson / Planning Tech.
BRENDA ANDERSON – Summer Student
ANNE-MARIE PAQUETTE – Summer Student / Planning Tech.
DIRK SMITH – Admin. Support
CAROLE CANNA – Planner
ERICH MACKOWSKY – Planner
GARRY SMITH – Planner
ELIZABETH ZWICKEL – Soil Specialist
JOHN HENDERSON – Soil Specialist
GUY YOUNG – Planning Tech.
GERRY JAILET – Draftsperson
WILLA ANDERSON – Draftsperson
JEAN CALAM – Summer Student
ANNE LEVESQUEAU – Admin. Support
Barbara Stogdon – Draftsperson
Colin Fry – Draftsperson
Dianne Stack – Admin. Support

Legal services for the Agricultural Land Commission have from inception been provided primarily by the following two firms: Alexander, Gusset, Holburn & Beaudin; and Farris, Vaughan, Wills & Murphy.

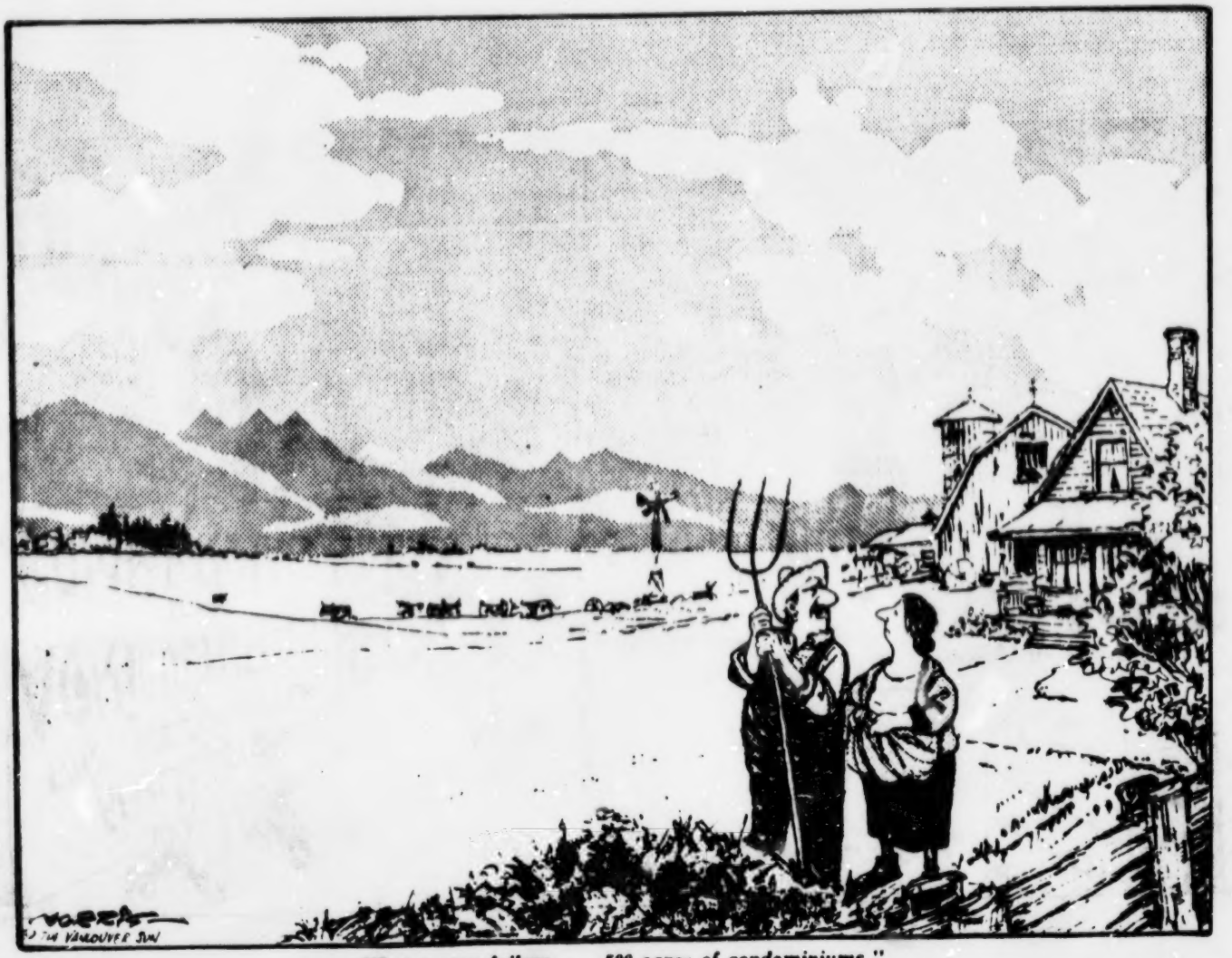
THE HUMOUROUS SIDE OF AGRICULTURAL LAND PRESERVATION IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

The ten-year history of British Columbia's agricultural preservation program has not only included some rather uncomfortable times for those associated with it, but the fortunes and misfortunes of the Commission and the program have also, over the years, provided fodder for cartoonists. The following is a collection of cartoons which provides a humourous insight into an otherwise serious topic.

"...So, you are the new shepherd!.."



"...when I retire I'm gonna make it into a one acre farm and a 149 acre house..."



"What a crop failure . . . 500 acres of condominiums."

APPLICATION
FOR REZONING
AGRICULTURAL
TO
COMMERCIAL
PLANNING
DEPT.

Huge profits for those who get land out of B.C.'s Agricultural Land Reserve

HEY POP, I DIDN'T KNOW THE B.C. LAND COMMISSION HAD BEEN AROUND HERE!

REFLECTIONS ON THE AGRICULTURAL LAND PRESERVATION PROGRAM

British Columbia's farmland preservation program, when first initiated in 1972, was a new approach, never seen before in North America. The past ten years have undoubtedly exposed those associated with the legislation to some interesting and perhaps unique experiences.

The following are some personal reflections by each of the four Chairmen of the Agricultural Land Commission since the inception of the program. Also included are statements from the B.C. Institute of Agrologists, and the B.C. Federation of Agriculture, two organizations who have held close associations with the Commission.

W. T. LANE, CHAIRMAN 1973 to 1975

When I received the telephone call asking me to serve as the first Chairman of the B.C. Land Commission, I was in the comfortable quarters of the Municipal Solicitor for Richmond. Needless to say, the appointment of a Chairman to what, at the time, was a new and controversial Commission raised the interest of the national press. A reporter from the Toronto Globe and Mail telephoned to arrange to take my picture on the nearest piece of land resembling a farm. His choice was a Vancouver City park, formerly part of the old Quilchena Golf Course. It struck me that the image of a new Chairman lolling on the 8th fairway somehow lacked the appropriate urgency.

Instead, I arranged to meet the gentleman at the huge model of the province which then was, and still is, located in the B.C. Pavilion at the P.N.E. With the permission of Exhibition management, and suitably shod in rubber-soled shoes, I climbed on the model, coming to rest precariously on a bit of level "land" just outside of Cache Creek! The point which I hoped the picture would stress was that suitable land for agricultural purposes in British Columbia was indeed rare. The fact the model had a vertical distortion of at least two to one assisted the cause and in the resulting half-page article the reporter made the point of the scarcity of agricultural land quite forcefully.

The first formal meeting of the Land Commission took place in a motel in Sydney outside of Victoria. We were very much pioneers in this sort of administration, there then being no comparable legislation nor documented experience in this field. In addition, the original Bill had been amended to add further "Checks and Balances". The statute which we were handed by the Government dealt with a number of quite distinct land-use problems. The best known and, to many people to this day, the only known element, was the provision that authorized land use controls for the protection of land suitable for agriculture.

In order to appreciate the complexity of the Act, which had been carefully worded by Legislative Counsel, I prepared a hand printed summary of the important sections showing all the subordinate clauses as offshoots of the main sentences. While the resultant chart looked very much like an exercise conducted by a Grade 8 school child, I believe it made a valuable contribution to the understanding of our varied responsibilities.

The Government's choice of Commissioners to serve with me was a particularly happy one. By custom, none of them was directly involved in Government, but each had an important contribution to make in the decisions which we were facing. The understanding which the group had of British Columbia, a body of land larger in area than California, Oregon and Washington states combined, was prodigious.

At the outset, the Commission's headquarters were located in a pleasant new office building just west of the Villa Hotel in Burnaby. We occupied a long, narrow interior space, affectionately known to staff as "The Yellow Submarine". Even before any office equipment had been delivered, letters started arriving in impressive numbers. To deal with the situation, correspondence was thumb-tacked to the wall and remained in full view until answered. This bit of ingenuity let me know at a glance whether any needed replies had been overlooked or otherwise sidetracked.

The building in which we laboured was part of a group of beautifully landscaped office structures put up by the same developer. One day, a Vancouver newspaper published a wide-ranging article on the burgeoning Provincial Government office space in the Lower Mainland - complete with photographs. We were amused to see a picture of the whole complex in which we were located, labelled "B.C. Land Commission", appearing in company with such stately structures as the B.C. Hydro building. The impression given was that our Commission had at least five hundred employees, instead of the six or eight actually engaged.

Interest in the new legislation was understandably, extensive. A few months

prior to the passing of our Land Commission Act of 1973, Ontario had brought into effect an enactment with similar objectives. Quebec, however, where the problem was as urgent as B.C., had not. The Quebec Government sent representatives to Vancouver to interview us. Mr. Runka, then Commission Manager, visited Quebec City at the request of their Ministry of Agriculture. The upshot was that all our legislation, regulations and forms were translated into French for the consideration of the National Assembly.

About this time, the American federal government, with Senator Henry Jackson of Washington State in the forefront, was attempting to get appropriate legislation through both Houses of Congress. The publications generated by the office of "the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs" (Sen. Jackson) were of great assistance. They summarized what had been done, and not done, in the fifty States of the Union.

Of particular interest was a printed and bound legal opinion prepared by three Chicago lawyers for the President's Committee on the Environment. These gentlemen had gone to Britian to search back to its origins in Saxon times, the position of government when a law or regulation affects private property. Their well-documented conclusion, based on English Common Law and its interpretation in colonial and republican America, was that government had the unquestioned right to make such laws. Examples of Elizabethan subdivision control legislation to protect the limited supply of "fewell and victuals", were enlightening.

A decade after the excitement which accompanied the establishment of what is now our Agricultural Land Commission, I am proud of the part I played in assisting the people of British Columbia to protect land for the supply of "victuals"; the "fewell" I will leave to the Energy Commission and the Sheiks of Araby!

G. G. RUNKA, CHAIRMAN 1975 to 1978

I accepted the job of General Manager of the newly appointed Land Commission with some reluctance. As a public servant with Soils Branch, Department of Agriculture at the time, I had been extensively involved in drawing up the "suggested ALR plans" for the various Regional Districts and had accompanied the Commissioners on their initial meetings with regional and local governments around the province. So, I had some idea of what I might be getting into. When I accepted the position of Commission Chairman in mid 1975, I again questioned my sanity, being in full knowledge of the volatile nature of the position. As it happened, I regreted neither decision. My time with the Agricultural Land Commission was an exciting, challenging experience, and I appreciated the opportunity to participate in such a worthwhile endeavour.

Ten years go by very quickly. It would have been interesting if, at the beginning, we had all sat down and wrote a scenario of what we thought the Land Commission and the agricultural land preservation program would be in ten years. However, there was little time then for such luxuries; the first few years especially were a maze of meetings, airplanes, telephones and long hours. Some first recollections are of Victoria staff hauling boxes of files containing applications under the Orders-in-Council back and forth for Commission consideration each Friday; of all the agricultural capability maps and suggested ALR plans filed by Regional District in piles on the floor, in the absence of map cabinets; of staff and the Commissioners struggling over the purchase of greenbelt properties in addition to the day to day workload related to getting the ALR's in place. Our building maintenance staff often complained that, between staff starting work early in the morning and other staff staying late at night, they never had a chance to clean the office.

Certain prerequisites to serving with the Land Commission soon evolved - while travelling, one had to be able to eat quickly and have faith that airplanes would not leave without us. If it was not a hearing in some local community hall, or a meeting with a Regional District board, there was always one more on-site that perhaps could be squeezed in on the way to the airport.

Telephones are another vivid memory of my years at the Agricultural Land Commission. When I first walked into the Commission offices, there was as yet no furniture, just an appropriately coloured green carpet. But, the telephones were connected, and they were already ringing. From that day on, at least to the time I left the Commission, they did not stop ringing.

Once Agricultural Land Reserve plans began to be designated, as General Manager, I had the dubious honour of having to sign numerous copies of each individual 1:50,000 base and larger scale constituent map. Staff were ingenious at synchronizing piles of maps, the corners of which could be flipped and each map duly signed at astonishing speed. These sessions might continue through one hundred to two hundred maps or until my hand could sign no more. Especially during 1974, this was regular penance every couple of weeks.

As the time went on, I'm sure many of us came to regard the days of establishing the ALR boundary as the easy ones; administering land use within the protected zone often proved complex and controversial. No program can be perfect. Mistakes are bound to be made at any and all points along the way, from legislation through to process to implementation. As I continue to travel extensively throughout B.C. however, I constantly ask myself, would this farmland be here today if it were not for the ALR? As I see the unabated pressures, not only from urban uses, but from other competing land users, I have to feel positive about the worth of the program this past decade. While I might see a few warts and sore thumbs here and there, I also see thousands of acres that, in my view, would have been lost to

food production forever, without the protection of the Agricultural Land Reserve.

Despite controversial beginnings of the agricultural land preservation program, I have seen, over the past decade, a growing segment of the population strongly supportive of the need to preserve agricultural land. While individual decisions may continue to be hotly debated, the central principle is no longer an issue. That in itself is a significant accomplishment in a ten year period.

During my work out of province as well, I have become aware that, while some provinces have established similar programs, and some states are experimenting with various mechanisms to pursue similar goals, B.C. is still regarded as having one of the more successful agricultural land preservation programs.

I look to the next ten years with caution. The strength of the ALR boundary cannot forever be held through restrictive regulation alone and hopefully, during its second decade, the Agricultural Land Commission will be able to play a more dynamic role in protecting the land resource by encouraging a healthy, diverse agricultural industry.

In my view, one of the most difficult challenges facing the Agricultural Land Commission during the next ten years will be integrating its interests and mandate with all the other resource demands upon the provincial land base. In a province with such a limited usable land resource base, each user must receive priority on its critical lands, but there must also be integrative mechanisms, to ensure resource priorities and trade-offs are part of an overall land use strategy for the greatest public benefit in the long term.

A.C. KINNEAR, CHAIRMAN, 1979 to 1980

During the time I served as interim Chairman, 4 January 1979 to 7 March 1980, I was fortunate in being associated with a very loyal and conscientious staff and group of Commissioners. In spite of the knowledge that I was only serving as a temporary Chairman, I always received the utmost co-operation from all members; without their full co-operation my job would have been far less enjoyable.

In retrospect, I feel that some of the most difficult decisions to be made by the Commission were those dealing with the conflicts between urban and rural requirements. Initially the ALR boundaries were considered to be the definitive boundary between agricultural land and non-agricultural land but, as time went on, we realized these boundaries were not "etched in stone" and a somewhat more philosophic attitude had to be considered. As we know, the original boundaries were based on information from a Canadian wide inventory of agricultural land financed and developed under the Federal ARDA program. As these boundaries were originally drawn, in many instances, following a reconnaissance method of assessment, it was obvious that a much more detailed study had to be made in many areas. Unfortunately, this fine-tuning program was never able to keep abreast of the demand.

The Commission in those days met with many of the Regional District and Municipal officials and staff and the open and frank discussions were always of considerable value to all participants. By understanding the goals and plans of each party, many of the philosphical types of decisions were made by the Commission. By taking this approach we felt we were not impeding the development of the community at the expense of small parcels of farmland which would eventually be in conflict with the natural urban development pattern.

Probably one of the most interesting and rewarding trips I made with the Commission was a rapid trip we made to Fort Nelson, B.C. We were scheduled to hold an evening public hearing of a projected exclusion application for a large acreage in this area. When we heard from many of the local residents and saw evidence of their accomplishments in the field of agriculture, we soon realized the potential of some limited agricultural production in this northern area.

The trip back to Vancouver that night in the Government Citation jet provided me with one of the most memorable sights I have ever seen. We were flying at 30,000 feet from Fort Nelson on a clear and cloudless night and were rewarded with a spectacular view of a brilliant display of aurora borealis. Even at 2 a.m. the loss of sleep was a small price to pay to see one of nature's wonders.

In conclusion, I would like to compliment all members of the Agricultural Land Commission for a job well done during the past ten years, and hope that the Commission will continue to play a vital role in the preservation of agricultural land in the future.

M.F. CLARKE, CHAIRMAN 1980 to -

As I look back over three years as Chairman, a veritable jumble of impressions come to mind. Many of these are of a personal nature; memories of difficult days, difficult decisions, humourous situations, and sometimes feelings of satisfaction resulting from worthwhile or, should I say, modest accomplishment. Despite the ups and downs, the strongest personal impression is that working with the Commission has provided an unequalled opportunity to associate with many dedicated, competent people in all walks of life.

The Land Commission Act, proclaimed only ten years ago, was the first attempt in Canada to legislate the preservation and management of the food land resource. As might be expected the initial reception of the new legislation was rather stormy. It is, in my opinion, very significant that it has survived the first decade with very little change. This would seem to indicate that the public at large have accepted the proposition that special measures are required to preserve our limited supply of agricultural land. We would be remiss if we did not recognize the contribution made by those who drafted the Act and brought it into being as well as those who made the legislation work, particularly for their efforts in creating an understanding of the legislation among the community at large.

The key question, however, is how effective have the successive Land Commissions been in protecting the farmland resource? I personally know of only two studies by others who have published their findings. One of these implies a satisfactory level of success for the Commission. The other indicates a satisfactory degree of performance in amount of land protected but expresses some concern about the high agricultural quality of some of the land that has been removed.

One of the difficulties in evaluating the performance of the Agricultural Land Commission is that there is no way of measuring what might have happened had the restrictive legislation not been in place. Probably of greater importance, is that the Agricultural Land Reserve had to be put in place rather quickly. This has led to a situation where some lands were included that do not rightfully belong within the Reserve. The converse is also true but evidence accumulated to date would indicate that this latter category represents a lesser area. Fine tuning has been a concern of the Commission since the beginning. The allotment of additional funds beginning in 1980 for fine tuning was a most welcome development. This has made it possible to examine soils in considerable detail in some areas of the province where ALR boundaries were inaccurately defined. Hopefully the program can be continued for a few more years. In addition it has been possible to correct some of the more obvious errors or ommissions in the course of the development of Settlement and Community Plans.

Recently particular attention has been given toward active dialogue with local governments in the formulation of local Community and Settlement Plans. In this regard, the Commission is grateful for the co-operation extended by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs that provides for the review of Settlement Plans prior to final approval. This, in our experience to date, has resulted in cost savings to the system as well as eliminating a certain amount of frustration on the part of local government. The basic premise in all of this is to attempt to create a satisfactory basis for shared decision making in developing agricultural land plans.

I seem to have started this brief dissertation on a positive note. There are, however, a number of challenges facing us in the years ahead. Aside from agriculture, there are some eleven other uses for land. The principal one of these other uses is, of course, residential land. In geographical terms the accommodation of all of these should be well within our capabilities. The Agricultural Land Reserve as presently constituted comprises slightly less than five percent of the land area

of the province. Although B.C. is very mountainous, a conservative estimate would indicate that the area of non-agricultural land suitable for non-agricultural use would amount to almost two and one half times the area of the Agricultural Land Reserve. Unfortunately our principal urban centres have been located within the regions having the best agricultural land. We of course are not unique in this respect, it has always been thus throughout history. Statements that our supply of land available for future exploitation is almost limitless, are of course, pure myth.

As population pressures or land demands increase we shall have to look first at establishing higher densities for urban settlement in existing centres. This in turn raises questions concerning optimum population levels for established communities, taking into account a host of social and economic factors. Attention will also have to be given to locating new urban centres and their associated activities on lands of low agricultural capability. Despite such measures, pressures on farm lands for other uses will continue. In order to facilitate its decision making process we require economic indices that will state more accurately and clearly the long term dollar values of continued agricultural production on a given parcel of land as compared to the quick capital gain associated with urban type development.

Looking further ahead, I am firmly of the opinion that we must strive to develop a fully integrated approach to land planning. Our land use problems are becoming increasingly complex and our decision making process lacks the flexibility to react adequately. This is due in part to the maze of jurisdictional responsibilities involving a host of agencies. Admittedly an integrated approach to overall resource management will be very difficult to achieve. It will necessitate a new approach to planning in which the plans by specific agencies or industry groups concerned with land, natural resources, etc., are melded into an overall resource management plan. This of necessity will call for a great deal of patience and interdisciplinary compromise. Failure to achieve this

type of approach will only lead to us being confronted with an increasingly bewildering array of single use legislative powers as priorities shift with the pressures of the moment.

B.C. INSTITUTE OF AGROLOGISTS

The B.C. Institute of Agrologists congratulates the Agricultural Land Commission at the close of its first decade. We have watched the Land Commission grow from an unwanted fledgling with not much more than a political mandate to a well respected and accepted part of the land use planning process. We are very pleased to contribute to the Commission's tenth anniversary report.

A number of significant changes have occurred in land use since the inception of the Agricultural Land Commission in 1972. Firstly, and very importantly there has been a substantial increase in public awareness of the need to preserve agricultural land. This is apparent from the results of opinion polls, letters to the editor and from conversations with our urban neighbours. Secondly, with the establishment of official regional or community plans in conjunction with ALR plans, unorganized areas where land was virtually unplanned now have land designated for long term agricultural use in tune with other community needs. Thirdly there has been a general change in the outlook of agricultural land holders from one of a very short term nature involving the possibility of subdivision or sale for urban development to long term planning for agricultural development. We believe that these changes would not have been possible without the Agricultural Land Commission and its protection of the farmland base. Significant losses of high quality agricultural lands would have occurred near all our urban centres but especially in the Fraser and Okanagan Valleys.

The BCIA and its members have been closely associated with the Land Commission from its inception. Agrologists were intimately involved in the designation of the Agricultural Land Reserves and have since co-operated with the Commission on a number of occasions. In addition, agrologists are frequently involved in specific land use decisions on behalf of the Commission or applicants to the Commission. Although both roles fall within the acceptable limits of our code of ethics, controversies arising out of agricultural land use issues have caused the B.C. Insti-

tute of Agrologists to take the lead in Canada in the development and enforcement of high professional standards for agrologists.

In looking to the future we foresee a number of desireable goals which the Commission might be able to achieve. Despite the relatively high level of public awareness of the need to preserve agricultural land, much educational work needs to be done to increase people's knowledge of their agricultural support system. Information needs are greatest in urban centres and amongst young people. The Commission could take an active educational role in this area as it started to do early in its existence. Furthermore, the land use decision making process could be improved by removing it as much as possible from the political sphere. Decisions made at the Cabinet level should deal with the "big picture" rather than appeals from individual landowners. The present system is wasteful of the minister's time and creates uncertainty in the decision-making process. We also feel the Commission could move more towards constructively fostering the health of B.C. Agriculture. Because of its province wide perspective the Commission is well suited to encourage and accept some of the risks of the development of soils and/or crops for which we have limited management experience. This could be done in conjunction with the ARDSA funding and would provide opportunities for new farmers. Some examples of potential but undeveloped lands include tree fruit and berry land on Vancouver Island, warm season vegetable or grape land near Ashcroft and vegetable land in the Kootenays.

The Commission has already played a similar role in encouraging agricultural development on existing farm lands. It may be possible to use the profits from the sale of some of these lands to finance additional purchases of potential farmlands. Lastly we would like to see the Commission in charge of managing Crown agricultural lands, such as the Harbours Board lands. It seems better to have publicly owned agricultural lands under one jurisdiction with the staff and proven ability to manage them effectively.

In conclusion, despite some disagreements with provincial agricultural land use decisions, we respect the work done by the Agricultural Land Commission. We look forward to seeing that the Commission's role evolves over its second decade to encompass activities such as public education and fostering new types of agricultural development.

B.C. FEDERATION OF AGRICULTURE

The government first announced its intention to establish an Agricultural Land Reserve at the BCFA Annual General Meeting in 1972. The Minister of Agriculture told delegates speculation in farmland was not going to be tolerated any longer and within days, in an effort to beat the forthcoming restrictions many people had deluged municipal and regional district offices with requests for subdivisions. The Government moved quickly in response, with an Order-in-Council to "freeze" farmland.

The debate unfolded. Farmers said they were not prepared to be locked into a non-viable industry and told the government they wanted viability guaranteed in the same legislation that froze their land.

In the spring of 1973 the Government introduced two Acts, one providing for the Land Commission and the other an income support scheme for farmers. The income support scheme was complex and had to be applied for by individual commodity groups. As a result it took several years to implement in some instances.

B.C.'s mountainous geography severely limits the percentage of land suitable for agriculture and creates intensive competition for use of valley bottoms. Urban, industrial, recreational and transportation uses compete with agriculture for a land base. Prior to the passage of the Land Commission Act, decisions on land use were made on an ad hoc basis, without regard to the big picture and the province's future food needs.

The existence of the Land Commission Act means the preservation of agricultural land for farming purposes is a priority and decisions on its future use will be based on factual evidence.

As a result of the legislation the BCFA has become more involved in land use issues and planning. We have worked jointly with a wide range of organizations including the B.C. Institute of Agrologists, the Profes-

sional Foresters, and the Housing and Urban Development Association of Canada. Farmers also play an important role in serving on advisory committees to the Land Commission.

Farmers' concerns today remain as they were ten years ago. Our industry must be viable and we would prefer to see the marketplace function in a manner that delivers a satisfactory income. If the marketplace fails us, and we wish to preserve farmland for the future, then society has to provide programs and policies to bring viability to the industry.

ANALYSIS AND OBSERVATION

It is difficult to objectively assess the overall degree of success which the B.C. agricultural land preservation program has had during the course of the past ten years. However, an analysis of statistical information from the provincial Ministry of Agriculture and Food and Statistics Canada shows that investment and income associated with agriculture is not only healthy but growing. While other factors also may have contributed to the growth of the agricultural sector, the protection afforded to the resource base by the Agricultural Land Reserve is nonetheless an important foundation for investment and growth in the agricultural sector. This in turn is a very significant stimulus for investment and growth of the overall provincial economy.

The economic contribution of agriculture is revealed by the 1981 census which shows that British Columbia farmers had 8.5 billion dollars invested in land, buildings and machinery, equipment, livestock and poultry. This figure represents more than a doubling of the 3.5 billion dollars invested in 1976 and more than a 425% increase in total farm capital invested in 1971. Aside from the direct investment there are a number of multiplier effects and spin-offs generated by this level of agricultural investment. Farm employment is one example and, according to the 1981 census of agriculture, 7,904 farms reported hiring agricultural labour either on a full-time or part-time basis.

It is perhaps more significant however to examine the growth of B.C. agriculture compared with other provinces in Canada. The 1981 census reveals that, on an average, the total number of Canadian farms and their total acreage has decreased. Between 1971 and 1981 the number of farms fell by 13%. However, during this period, British Columbia was the only province to report an increase in the number of farms, up 9% to 20,012. The following Table 2 summarizes the change in farm totals by province across Canada:

NUMBER OF FARMS

	1971	1976	1981	% CHANGE 1971 - 81
CANADA	366,128	338,578	318,361	- 13.0
NEWFOUNDLAND	1,042	878	679	- 34.8
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND	4,543	3,677	3,154	- 30.6
NOVA SCOTIA	6,008	5,434	5,045	- 16.0
NEW BRUNSWICK	5,485	4,551	4,063	- 25.9
QUEBEC	61,257	51,587	48,144	- 21.4
ONTARIO	94,722	88,801	82,448	- 13.0
MANITOBA	34,981	32,104	29,442	- 15.8
SASKATCHEWAN	76,970	70,958	67,318	- 12.5
ALBERTA	62,702	61,130	58,056	- 7.4
BRITISH COLUMBIA	18,400	19,432	20,012	+ 8.8

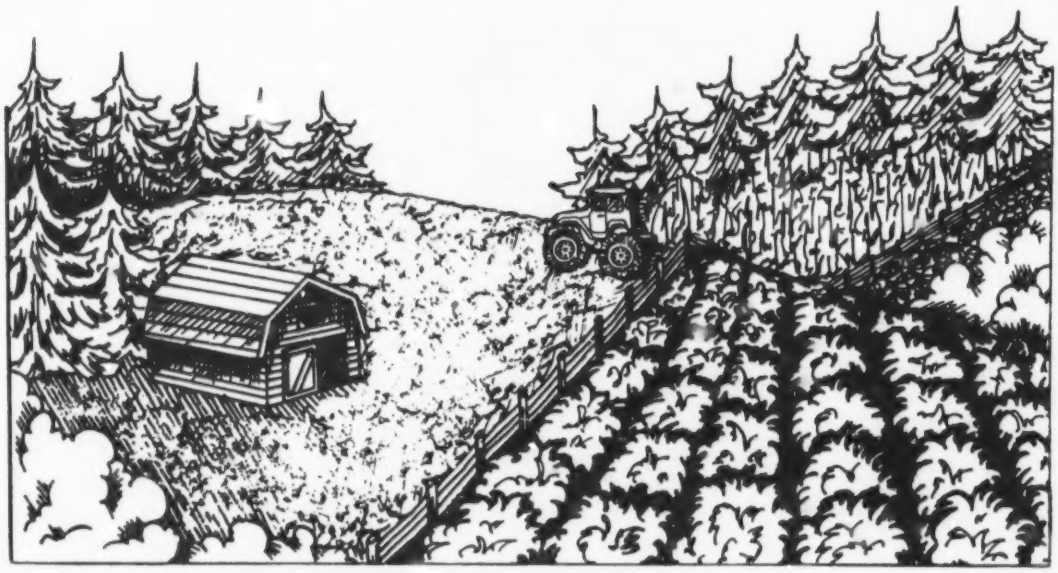
SOURCE: STATISTICS CANADA 1981 CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE

The Census of Agriculture for British Columbia further delineates farms by value of product sales. An analysis shows that the number of farms with product sales of $1,200 and over has increased from 8,625 in 1971 to 13,597 in 1981. This represents a 57% increase over the past ten years. Moreover, the last ten years has seen a 367% increase in the total value of sales from $209 million in 1971 to close to $800 million in 1980.

The statistics also show that as the number of farms increase, the area in production also rises - over 12,000 hectares per year are cleared, broken and brought into production. It is reassuring to know that the 4.7 million hectares of land protected by the Agricultural Land Reserve is available to draw upon to meet future food demands.

Many factors such as marketing patterns and economic trends influence the state of provincial farm development. Both Federal and Provincial Agriculture Ministries have been instrumental in assisting farmers in B.C. in the development and maintenance of a healthy farm economy. Further, the farmers themselves, through their dedicated efforts, are an essential component of a sound agricultural sector. It is indeed gratifying to note that British Columbia farms have expanded in number as well as in hectarage cleared and cultivated over the past ten years. One factor which

must certainly receive some credit for this is the existence of a protected agricultural land base under the \gricultural Land Reserve where farm investment can be made with confidence because the land base is securely protected for agricultural use.



Without an exact model of a British Columbia which did not have an agricultural land preservation program over the past ten years, it is impossible to accurately compare how the agricultural landscape of B.C. would look today without the Agricultural Land Reserve. However, based on the number of subdivision and exclusion applications which have been refused by the Commission over the years, it is safe to conjecture that the agricultural land resource would be significantly smaller than it is today. Further, looking back at Table 1, it is noted that there were 4,721,295 hectares of ALR upon designation. By April 1982, 4,687,977 hectares of land still remain designated as ALR which represents a reduction of less than 1% of the total at time of designation. It was also seen earlier in this report

that a healthy and growing agricultural industry has developed around the agricultural resource and that part of this growth can be attributed to the security of the agricultural land base itself. All in all, on the basis of subjective evaluation, the first ten years of the province's agricultural land preservation program appear to have achieved the results expected of it.

To talk only about the successes of the program, however, would not constitute a total and fair assessment. As in the administration of any program, there have been setbacks, failures and many disappointments. These include overturned decisions with which the Commission could not agree, the failure of some important inclusion applications, lack of progress in positive legislative changes, a seeming loss of priority over the years to positive thrusts to support and encourage the agricultural community and a concomitant tendency to see the Commission as more of a negative regulatory body. Despite its clear reporting responsibility to the Minister and its status as an independent Crown corporation, the Commission appears to have a very tenuous independance not only of all levels of the political arm, but increasingly in its internal administrative relationship within the Ministry of Agriculture and Food.

Perhaps the Commission's greatest area of deficiency has been in the lack of adequate communication in its relationship with the legislators in Victoria. In several appeal and application situations involving the Cabinet, the Commission has been in disagreement with the resulting decision. Many of these disagreements could have been lessened through stronger dialogue between the Commission and Cabinet concerning the issues at hand. Where the politicians disagree with the Commission, it may be that the Commission has not done a satisfactory and complete job of presenting the issues and concerns.

While a great deal more can be done to increase the level of understanding with the legislators in Victoria, there is reasonable satisfaction with communicative efforts at a more local level. The Commission spends a

great deal of its time travelling and meeting with the public, local politicians, and various agencies and this affords an excellent opportunity for effective face to face communication. It is more than evident that future success in protecting the agricultural land base will require a process of continuous dialogue between the Commission and all related individuals and agencies.

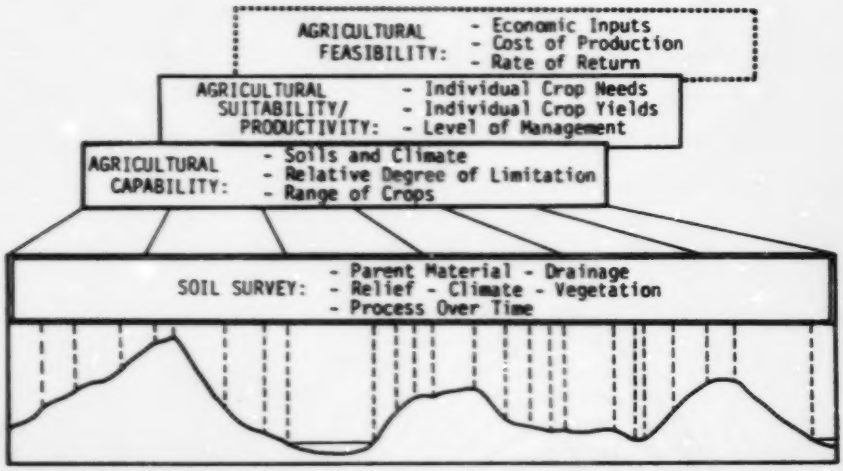
THE FUTURE

The first ten years of experience of agricultural land preservation in British Columbia have proceeded through uncharted territory, but the ship is still afloat. The legislation was first received with considerable controversy. However, over a relatively short period of time it began and continues to gather increasing support. British Columbia's legislative experience served as a model for several other jurisdictions in North America to follow, and the concept of agricultural land preservation has spread in a positive fashion.

The objective of the legislation, as noted earlier, is to preserve agricultural land. The determination of what type of land is good agricultural land is a very complex one. One measure of agricultural potential is the Canada Land Inventory (CLI) agricultural capability rating system which uses the inherent soil and climate characteristics to determine the range of crops that can be grown. It is interesting to note that many people believe that this system is enshrined in the legislation especially in reference to Class 1 to 4 lands. In reality the *Agricultural Land Commission Act* contains absolutely no reference to any system of measuring the quality of land. The CLI system was used initially as the touchstone in the preparation of the Agricultural Land Reserve plans because it was biophysically based and was the only reasonably comprehensive system available for the whole province. However, this system gives absolutely no indication of the yield or productivity of the land for individual crops or of the unique suitability of certain lands for certain agricultural crops. It is only useful as a general indicator of agricultural potential. It must be supplemented by other information. Other parameters of agricultural potential are: suitability for general agricultural purposes, suitability for specific agricultural crops, productivity or yield ratings, and homogeneity or integrity of the farming community, both present and future.

An overdependence on the Canada Land Inventory system has clearly pointed out its shortcomings and limitations. It has done the job it was initially

intended to do, but many will admit that, without balancing and supplementing it with other data - other measuring sticks - it is being abused or used beyond its limits and original intentions. As a result more emphasis needs to be placed on other measures yet being developed to obtain a comprehensive assessment of the quality of any land for agricultural purposes. The next ten years must provide a very strong focus on the development of varied but comprehensive systems of agricultural land assessment so that we may increase our knowledge of the potential of land for agricultural purposes. Alternative approaches are shown below



The Commission also hopes to see an eventual computerization of its file information system. With over 16,000 applications, plans and projects on file in the Commission's office, an information retrieval system is seen as essential in the future as applications and projects reviewed by the Commission grow in numbers and complexity. Such a system would facilitate monitoring and statistical feedback concerning the status of the provincial agricultural resource.

The reaping of long-term benefits from the agricultural land preservation program is tied inextricably to the maintenance of a healthy agricultural community. It is in this sphere that the Commission needs to place more emphasis and priority. The regulatory aspects (often perceived as negative in nature) of the Commission's work are well established and

functioning. These need to be balanced by positive thrusts and efforts aimed at bolstering and supporting the farm community. Issues such as additional financial support programs, education of the public to farming realities and facing and resolving farm/non farm conflicts need to be addressed. Measures need to be taken to protect the farmer and his expertise - to attract young people to farming as a viable career and way of life.

It is hoped that the future will see the Commission taking a more active role in promoting farm development of Agricultural Land Reserve lands through specific projects. Many of the earlier examples of the farmland acquisition/lease program could bear repeating. Unfortunately, the earlier program was ended due to budgetary limitations but when the provincial economy improves, the Commission hopes to again become involved in such a program to assist in the development of the agricultural land resource.

Attempting to foresee the future is always an uncertain exercise. However, the continuance of a sound Agricultural Land Reserve is an important aspect in ensuring that a source of future food supplies is indeed certain.

Agriculture is becoming a full partner in the total land resource equation and with this comes a need for a better balance and integration with other land users. Despite the somewhat false impression that B.C. is a land-rich province, we are quickly running out of frontiers and can no longer afford to erode this limited resource through poorly thought out single purpose land alienations. Agricultural lands are extremely important but they are also suitable for and not necessarily incompatible with other uses such as forestry and some limited wildlife or low-intensity recreational uses. The next ten years will be critical in terms of our decisions on the allocation of our agricultural land base. Preservation of the resource is the first step, but allocation of the resource is a demanding task which will require a great deal of soul searching - we will need to tread warily.

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